

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 007673

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2014

TAGS: PREL PK

SUBJECT: INDIAN JOURNALISTS RAVE ABOUT VISIT TO PAKISTANI KASHMIR

Classified By: DCM Robert O. Blake, Jr. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Participants returning from a November 19-December 1 trip by 26 Indian journalists to Pakistan have reported overwhelming positive impressions of their visit.
¶2. (C) Organized by the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA), this was a return visit after a group of Pakistani journalists came to India in October.
¶3. (C) In conversations following their return, the Indian journalists praised the warm reception and hospitality they received almost across the border.

¶4. (C) Kashmiri reporters told us their strongest impression was the yearning in POK for an opening of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Road, hope expressed by many.
Other Observations

¶5. (C) Trip participants also made other observations on their experiences in POK, the most interesting of which we summarize below:
-- Tahir Mohiuddin (Chattan/Srinagar) was impressed that he no longer saw militants traveling openly on the roads, as he had four years ago.
-- V Sudarshan (Outlook) reported that nostalgia, hate, metaphor, reality greeted the journalists in Mirpur. Interlocutors reportedly told him residents of POK were "not even allowed to go to Gilgit." Other POK residents considered the governments' policies.
-- Shujaat Bukhari (Hindu) was struck by the size of the migration from J&K to POK since the insurgency began in 1989, observing that 35,000 people had moved.
-- Sushant Saran (Observer Research Foundation, Delhi) reported widely diverging views on the shape of a final settlement of Kashmir. He was particularly interested in the views of former Azad Kashmiris.
-- Other journalists reported a session they had at Azad Kashmir University in Muzaffarabad, where they heard strong pro-independence and pro-India arguments.
-- Indrajit Hazra (Hindustan Times) was amazed to see Tarun Vijay, Editor of the RSS weekly Panchajanya, "barely able to hold himself back from laughing."
-- Hazra also reported that "azadi" ("freedom") is "on all minds" in POK, more so in Mirpur than in Muzaffarabad, where she noted a racial divide.
-- Several found significant improvements since previous visits 4-10 years ago. They were impressed with infrastructure improvements in Gilgit-Baltistan.
Comment

¶6. (C) As with the October visit by Pakistani journalists to J&K, this visit was unusually successful in exposing influential Indian and Pakistani media to the reality of life in POK. New Delhi and Islamabad can ignore this popular opinion as they bicker over travelers' documentation, but from the Delhi perspective the decision is clear: MULFORD